

Twelve Olympians

In ancient Greek religion and mythology, the **twelve Olympians** are the major deities of the Greek pantheon, commonly considered to be Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Demeter, Athena, Apollo, Artemis, Ares, Hephaestus, Aphrodite, Hermes, and either Hestia or Dionysus.^[2] They were called *Olympians* because, according to tradition, they resided on Mount Olympus.

Although Hades was a major ancient Greek god and was the brother of the first generation of Olympians (Zeus, Poseidon, Hera, Demeter, and Hestia), his realm was the underworld, far from Olympus, and thus he was not usually considered to be one of the Olympians.

Besides the twelve Olympians, there were many other cultic groupings of twelve gods.



Fragment of a Hellenistic relief (1st century BC–1st century AD) depicting the twelve Olympians carrying their attributes in procession; from left to right: Hestia (scepter), Hermes (winged cap and staff), Aphrodite (veiled), Ares (helmet and spear), Demeter (scepter and wheat sheaf), Hephaestus (staff), Hera (scepter), Poseidon (trident), Athena (owl and helmet), Zeus (thunderbolt and staff), Artemis (bow and quiver), Apollo (lyre), from the Walters Art Museum.^[1]

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Olympians

The Olympians were a race of deities, primarily consisting of a third and fourth generation of immortal beings, worshipped as the principal gods of the Greek pantheon and so named because of their residency atop Mount Olympus. They gained their supremacy in a ten-year-long war of gods, in which Zeus led his siblings to victory over the previous generation of ruling immortal beings, the Titans. They were a family of gods, the most important consisting of the first generation of Olympians, offspring of the Titans Cronus and Rhea: Zeus, Poseidon, Hera, Demeter and Hestia, along with the principal offspring of Zeus: Athena, Apollo, Artemis, Ares, Aphrodite,^[3] Hephaestus, Hermes, and Dionysus. Although Hades was a major deity in the Greek pantheon and was the brother of Zeus and the other first generation of Olympians, his realm was far away from Olympus in the underworld, and thus he was not usually considered to be one of the Olympians.^[4] Olympic gods can be contrasted to chthonic gods^[5] including Hades, by mode of sacrifice, the latter receiving sacrifices in a *bothros* (βόθρος, "pit") or *megaron* (μέγαρον, "sunken chamber")^[6] rather than at an altar.

The canonical number of Olympian gods was twelve, but besides the (thirteen) principal Olympians listed above, there were many other residents of Olympus, who thus might be considered to be Olympians.^[7] Heracles became a resident of Olympus after his apotheosis and married another Olympian resident Hebe.^[8] In the *Iliad*, the goddess Themis, who is listed among the twelve Titans, dwells on Olympus alongside the other gods,^[9] making her a Titan and an Olympian at the same time. According to Hesiod, the children of Styx: Zelus (Envy), Nike (Victory), Kratos (Strength), and Bia (Force), "have no house apart from Zeus, nor any dwelling nor path except that wherein God leads them, but they dwell always with Zeus".^[10] Some others who might be considered Olympians include the Muses, the Graces, Iris, Dione, Eileithyia, the Horae, and Ganymede.^[11]

Twelve gods

Besides the twelve Olympians, there were many other various cultic groupings of twelve gods throughout ancient Greece. The earliest evidence of Greek religious practice involving twelve gods (Greek: δωδεκάθεον, *dōdekátheon*, from δώδεκα *dōdeka*, "twelve", and θεοί *theoi*, "gods") comes no earlier than the late sixth century BC.^[12] According to Thucydides, an altar of the twelve gods was established in the agora of Athens by the archon Pisistratus (son of Hippias and the grandson of the tyrant Pisistratus), around 522 BC.^[13] The altar became the central point from which distances from Athens were measured and a place of supplication and refuge.^[14]

Olympia apparently also had an early tradition of twelve gods.^[15] The *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* (c. 500 BC) has the god Hermes divide a sacrifice of two cows he has stolen from Apollo, into twelve parts, on the banks of the river Alpheus (presumably at Olympia):

Next glad-hearted Hermes dragged the rich meats he had prepared and put them on a smooth, flat stone, and divided them into twelve portions distributed by lot, making each portion wholly honorable.^[16]

Pindar, in an ode written to be sung at Olympia c. 480 BC, has Heracles sacrificing, alongside the Alpheus, to the "twelve ruling gods":^[17]

He [Heracles] enclosed the Altis all around and marked it off in the open, and he made the encircling area a resting-place for feasting, honoring the stream of the Alpheus along with the twelve ruling gods.^[18]

Another of Pindar's Olympian odes mentions "six double altars".^[19] Herodorus of Heraclea (c. 400 BC) also has Heracles founding a shrine at Olympia, with six pairs of gods, each pair sharing a single altar.^[20]


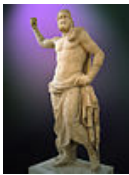



Many other places had cults of the twelve gods, including Delos, Chalcedon, Magnesia on the Maeander, and Leontinoi in Sicily.^[21] As with the twelve Olympians, although the number of gods was fixed at twelve, the membership varied.^[22] While the majority of the gods included as members of these other cults of twelve gods were Olympians, non-Olympians were also sometimes included. For example, Herodorus of Heraclea identified the six pairs of gods at Olympia as: Zeus and Poseidon, Hera and Athena, Hermes and Apollo, the Graces and Dionysus, Artemis and Alpheus, and Cronus and Rhea.^[23] Thus, while this list includes the eight Olympians: Zeus, Poseidon, Hera, Athena, Hermes, Apollo, Artemis, and Dionysus, it also contains three clear non-Olympians: the Titan parents of the first generation of Olympians, Cronus and Rhea, and the river god Alpheus, with the status of the Graces (here apparently counted as one god) being unclear.







Plato connected "twelve gods" with the twelve months and implies that he considered Pluto one of the twelve in proposing that the final month be devoted to him and the spirits of the dead.^[24]

The Roman poet Ennius gives the Roman equivalents (the *Dii Consentes*) as six male-female complements,^[25] preserving the place of Vesta (Greek Hestia), who played a crucial role in Roman religion as a state goddess maintained by the Vestals.

List

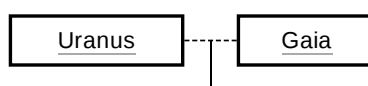
There is no single canonical list of the twelve Olympian gods. The thirteen Greek gods and goddesses, along with their Roman counterparts, most commonly considered to be one of the twelve Olympians are listed below.

| Greek | Roman | Image | Functions and attributes |
|-------------------------|----------------|---|--|
| <u>Zeus</u> | <u>Jupiter</u> |  | <p>King of the gods and ruler of <u>Mount Olympus</u>; god of the sky, lightning, thunder, law, order and justice.</p> <p>The youngest child of the Titans Cronus and Rhea. Brother and husband of Hera and brother of Poseidon, Hades, Demeter, and Hestia. He had many affairs with goddesses and mortals, such as his sister Demeter, the Titan <u>Leto</u>, mortals <u>Leda</u> and <u>Alcmene</u>, and more.^[26]</p> <p>His symbols include the thunderbolt, eagle, oak tree, bull, scepter, and scales.</p> |
| <u>Hera</u> | <u>Juno</u> |  | <p>Queen of the gods and the goddess of marriage, women, childbirth and family.</p> <p>The youngest daughter of Cronus and Rhea. Sister and wife of Zeus. Being the goddess of marriage, she frequently tried to get revenge on Zeus' lovers and their children.</p> <p>Her symbols include the peacock, cuckoo, and cow.</p> |
| <u>Poseidon</u> | <u>Neptune</u> |  | <p>God of the seas, water, storms, hurricanes, earthquakes and horses.</p> <p>The middle son of Cronus and Rhea. Brother of Zeus and Hades. Married to the <u>Nereid Amphitrite</u>; although, as with many of the male Greek gods, he had many lovers.</p> <p>His symbols include the horse, bull, dolphin, and trident.</p> |
| <u>Demeter</u> | <u>Ceres</u> |  | <p>Goddess of the harvest, fertility, agriculture, nature and the seasons. She presided over <u>grains</u> and the <u>fertility</u> of the earth.</p> <p>The middle daughter of Cronus and Rhea. Also the lover of Zeus and Poseidon, and the mother of Persephone, <u>Despoine</u>, Arion.</p> <p>Her symbols include the poppy, wheat, torch, cornucopia, and pig.</p> |
| <u>Athena</u> | <u>Minerva</u> |  | <p>Goddess of wisdom, handicraft, and warfare.^[27]</p> <p>The daughter of Zeus and the <u>Oceanid Metis</u>, she rose from her father's head fully grown and in full battle armor.</p> <p>Her symbols include the owl and the olive tree.</p> |
| <u>Apollo / Apollon</u> | <u>Apollo</u> |  | <p>God of light, the Sun, <u>prophecy</u>, <u>philosophy</u>, archery, truth, inspiration, poetry, music, arts, manly beauty, medicine, healing, and plague.</p> <p>The son of Zeus and Leto, and the twin brother of Artemis.</p> <p>His symbols include the Sun, bow and arrow, lyre, swan, and mouse.</p> |
| <u>Artemis</u> | <u>Diana</u> |  | <p>Goddess of the hunt, the wilderness, virginity, the Moon, archery, childbirth, protection and plague.</p> <p>The daughter of Zeus and <u>Leto</u>, and the twin sister of Apollo.</p> <p>Her symbols include the Moon, horse, deer, hound, she-bear, snake, cypress tree, and bow and arrow.</p> |
| <u>Ares</u> | <u>Mars</u> | | <p>God of war, violence, bloodshed and manly virtues.</p> <p>The son of Zeus and Hera, all the other gods despised him except Aphrodite. His Latin name, Mars, gave us the word "<u>martial</u>."</p> <p>His symbols include the boar, serpent, dog, vulture, spear, and shield.</p> |

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| | |  | |
| <u>Aphrodite</u> | <u>Venus</u> |  | <p>Goddess of love, pleasure, passion, procreation, fertility, beauty and desire.</p> <p>The daughter of Zeus and the Oceanid Dione, or perhaps born from the sea foam after Uranus' blood dripped into the sea after being castrated by his youngest son, Cronus, who then threw his father's genitals into the sea. Married to Hephaestus, although she had many adulterous affairs, most notably with Ares. Her name gave us the word "<u>aphrodisiac</u>", while her Latin name, Venus, gave us the word "<u>venereal</u>".</p> <p>Her symbols include the dove, bird, apple, bee, swan, <u>myrtle</u>, and rose.</p> |
| <u>Hephaestus</u> | <u>Vulcan</u> |  | <p>Master blacksmith and craftsman of the gods; god of the forge, craftsmanship, invention, fire and volcanoes.</p> <p>The son of Hera, either by Zeus or through <u>parthenogenesis</u>. Married to Aphrodite. His Latin name, Vulcan, gave us the word "<u>volcano</u>."</p> <p>His symbols include fire, anvil, axe, donkey, hammer, tongs, and quail.</p> |
| <u>Hermes</u> | <u>Mercury</u> |  | <p>Messenger of the gods; god of travel, commerce, communication, borders, eloquence, diplomacy, thieves, and games. He was also the guide of dead souls.</p> <p>The son of Zeus and the nymph <u>Maia</u>. The second-youngest Olympian, just older than Dionysus.</p> <p>His symbols include the caduceus (staff entwined with two snakes), winged sandals and cap, stork, and tortoise (whose shell he used to invent the lyre).</p> |
| <i>Most lists of the "twelve Olympians" consist of the above eleven plus either Hestia or Dionysus</i> | | | |
| <u>Hestia</u> | <u>Vesta</u> |  | <p>Goddess of the hearth, fire and of the right ordering of domesticity and the family; she was born into the first Olympian generation and was one of the original twelve Olympians. She is the first child of Cronus and Rhea, the elder sister of Hades, Demeter, Poseidon, Hera, and Zeus.</p> <p><i>Some lists of the Twelve Olympians omit her in favor of Dionysus, but the speculation that she gave her throne to him in order to keep the peace seems to be modern invention.</i></p> |
| <u>Dionysus / Bacchus</u> | <u>Bacchus</u> |  | <p>God of wine, the grapevine, fertility, festivity, ecstasy, madness and resurrection. Patron god of the art of theatre.</p> <p>The son of Zeus and the mortal Theban princess <u>Semele</u>. Married to the Cretan princess <u>Ariadne</u>. The youngest Olympian god, as well as the only one to have a mortal mother.</p> <p>His symbols include the grapevine, ivy, cup, tiger, panther, leopard, dolphin, goat, and pinecone.</p> |

Genealogy

Major Olympians' family tree ^[28]



3. According to Homer, Aphrodite was the daughter of Zeus (*Iliad* 3.374 (<http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0012.tlg001.perseus-eng1:3.374>), 20.105 (<http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0012.tlg001.perseus-eng1:20.105>); *Odyssey* 8.308 (<http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0012.tlg002.perseus-eng1:8.308>), 320 (<http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0012.tlg002.perseus-eng1:8.320>)) and Dione (*Iliad* 5.370–71 (<http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0012.tlg001.perseus-eng1:5.370>)), see Gantz, pp. 99–100. However, According to Hesiod, *Theogony* 183–200 (<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Hes.+Th.+183>), Aphrodite was born from Uranus' severed genitals, see Gantz, pp. 99–100.
4. Hansen, p. 250 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=a-NmaO-kM2UC&pg=PA250>); Morford, p. 113; Hard p. 80 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=r1Y3xZWVInIC&pg=PA80>).
5. Chadwick, p. 85 (<https://archive.org/details/mycenaeanworld00chad/page/85>).
6. Dillon, p. 114 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=A4YyVL0sygAC&pg=PA114>).
7. Ogden, pp. 2–3 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=yOQtHNJJU9UC&pg=PA2>); Dowden, p. 43 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=yOQtHNJJU9UC&pg=PA43>); Hansen, p. 250 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=a-NmaO-kM2UC&pg=PA250>); Burkert, p. 125.
8. Herodotus, 2.43–44 (<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0126%3Abook%3D2%3Achapter%3D43>).
9. Homer, *Iliad* 15.88 (<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0134%3Abook%3D15%3Acard%3D78>).
10. Hesiod, *Theogony* 386–388 (<http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0020.tlg001.perseus-eng1:371-403>).
11. Just who might be called an Olympian is not entirely clear. For example, Dowden, p. 43 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=yOQtHNJJU9UC&pg=PA43>), describes Heracles, Hebe, the Muses, and the Graces as Olympians, and on p. 45 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=yOQtHNJJU9UC&pg=PA45>), lists Iris, Dione, and Eileithyia among the Homeric Olympians, while Hansen, p. 250 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=a-NmaO-kM2UC&pg=PA250>), describes Heracles, Hebe, the Horae, and Ganymede as notable residents of Olympus, but says they "are not ordinarily classified as Olympians".
12. Dowden, p. 43 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=yOQtHNJJU9UC&pg=PA43>); Rutherford, p. 43.
13. Rutherford, pp. 43–44; Thucydides, 6.54.6–7 (<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0105%3Abook%3D6%3Achapter%3D54>).
14. Gadbery, p. 447.
15. Dowden, p. 43 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=yOQtHNJJU9UC&pg=PA43>); Rutherford, p. 44; Long, pp. 58–62 (T 13), 154–157.
16. Long, pp. 61–62 (T 13 G), 156–157; *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, 128–129 (<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?sessionid=D804873CE4D29E774667567AC3A6A3E0?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0138%3Ahy mn%3D4%3Acard%3D94>).
17. Dowden, p. 43 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=yOQtHNJJU9UC&pg=PA43>); Rutherford, p. 44; Long, pp. 59–60 (T 13 C), 154–155.
18. Pindar, *Olympian* 10.49 (<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0162%3Abook%3DO.%3Apoem%3D10>).
19. Rutherford, p. 44; Long, pp. 58 (T 13 A), 154; Pindar, *Olympian* 5.5 (<http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0033.tlg001.perseus-eng1:5>).
20. Dowden, p. 43 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=yOQtHNJJU9UC&pg=PA43>); Rutherford, p. 47; Long, pp. 58–59 (T 13 B), 154; *FGrH* 31 F34a-b.
21. Rutherford, p. 45; Delos: Long, pp. 11 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=3dUUAAAAIAAJ&pg=PA11>), 87–90 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=3dUUAAAAIAAJ&pg=PA87>) (T 26), 182 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=3dUUAAAAIAAJ&pg=PA182>); Chalcedon: Long, pp. 56 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=3dUUAAAAIAAJ&pg=PA56>)–57 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=3dUUAAAAIAAJ&pg=PA57>) (T 11 D), 217 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=3dUUAAAAIAAJ&pg=PA217>)–218 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=3dUUAAAAIAAJ&pg=PA218>); Magnesia on the Maeander: Long, pp. 53–54 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=3dUUAAAAIAAJ&pg=PA53>) (T 7), 221 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=3dUUAAAAIAAJ&pg=PA221>)–223 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=3dUUAAAAIAAJ&pg=PA223>); Leontinoi: Long, pp. 95 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=3dUUAAAAIAAJ&pg=PA95>)–96 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=3dUUAAAAIAAJ&pg=PA96>) (T 32), p. 157 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=3dUUAAAAIAAJ&pg=PA157>).
22. Long, pp. 360–361, lists 54 Greek (and Roman) gods, including the thirteen Olympians mentioned above, who have been identified as members of one or more cultic groupings of twelve gods.
23. Dowden, p. 43 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=yOQtHNJJU9UC&pg=PA43>); Rutherford, p. 47; Hard, p. 81 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=r1Y3xZWVInIC&pg=PA81>); Long, pp. 58–59 (T 13 B), 141, 154; *FGrH* 31 F34a-b.

24. Rutherford, pp. 45–46; Plato, *The Laws* 82b–d (<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0166%3Abook%3D8%3Asection%3D828b>).
25. "Greek mythology". *Encyclopedia Americana*. Vol. 13. 1993. p. 431.
26. Hamilton, Edith. *Mythology : timeless tales of gods and heroes* (<https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1004059928>). Tierney, Jim. (75th anniversary illustrated ed.). New York. ISBN 978-0-316-43852-0. OCLC 1004059928 (<https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1004059928>).
27. Inc, Merriam-Webster (1995). *Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature*. Merriam-Webster. p. 81 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=eKNK1YwHcQ4C&pg=PA81url=https://books.google.com/books?id=eKNK1YwHcQ4C&pg=PA81>). ISBN 9780877790426.
28. This chart is based upon Hesiod's *Theogony*, unless otherwise noted.
29. According to Homer, *Iliad* 1.570–579 (<http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0012.tlg001.perseus-eng1:1.570>), 14.338 (<http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0012.tlg001.perseus-eng1:14.338>), *Odyssey* 8.312 (<http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0012.tlg002.perseus-eng1:8.312>), Hephaestus was apparently the son of Hera and Zeus, see Gantz, p. 74.
30. According to Hesiod, *Theogony* 927–929 (<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Hes.+Th.+927>), Hephaestus was produced by Hera alone, with no father, see Gantz, p. 74.
31. According to Hesiod, *Theogony* 886–890 (<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Hes.+Th.+886>), of Zeus' children by his seven wives, Athena was the first to be conceived, but the last to be born; Zeus impregnated Metis then swallowed her, later Zeus himself gave birth to Athena "from his head", see Gantz, pp. 51–52, 83–84.
32. According to Hesiod, *Theogony* 183–200 (<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Hes.+Th.+183>), Aphrodite was born from Uranus' severed genitals, see Gantz, pp. 99–100.
33. According to Homer, Aphrodite was the daughter of Zeus (*Iliad* 3.374 (<http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0012.tlg001.perseus-eng1:3.374>), 20.105 (<http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0012.tlg001.perseus-eng1:20.105>); *Odyssey* 8.308 (<http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0012.tlg002.perseus-eng1:8.308>), 320 (<http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0012.tlg002.perseus-eng1:3.320>)) and Dione (*Iliad* 5.370–71 (<http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0012.tlg001.perseus-eng1:5.370>)), see Gantz, pp. 99–100.

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